

Hazing, Harassment, and Bullying Advisory Council

Currently 17 members representing the Agency of Education, Vermont School Boards Association, Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont Principals' Association, Vermont NEA, Burlington School District, Vermont Independent Schools Association, Outright Vermont, Vermont Center for Independent Living, Vermont Human Rights Commission, Partnership for Fairness and Diversity, and three high schools, along with one parent and one independent consultant, serve on the Advisory Council.

The council meets every other month with additional work group meetings and activities in between full council meetings.

The overall objective of the Advisory Council is "to review and coordinate school and statewide activities relating to the prevention of and response to harassment, hazing, and bullying."

Advisory Council history:

2012: During its initial meeting in August 2012, the council generated a list of 15 key issues, 3 of which were prioritized and served as the basis for the formation of work groups:

- data collection,
- student leadership, and
- pre-service and in-service staff development.

2013: The full council as well as work group meetings continued in 2013, resulting in the following accomplishments:

- **Listening Tour:** In order for the council to make informed recommendations, we felt it was crucial to gather information and feedback from students from around the state about what is happening in schools, what is working and not working in terms of current strategies to address hazing, harassment, and bullying, and what adults can do differently to improve how we respond to and address these kinds of incidents. To that end, a Listening Tour was conducted in October 2013, with groups of council members traveling to 5 schools in Winooski, Newport, Hartford, Brattleboro, and Brandon to meet with and hear from middle and high school students. The event was very successful and provided great insight into student experiences and perspectives on bullying and harassment in Vermont schools. We hope to repeat this activity on an annual basis, with a new set of schools each year. We also hope to engage in a similar activity to gather information and feedback from school staff. Some key findings and issues are included in a separate document.

Data collection work group:

- After reviewing data from recent national surveys and examining the limited data collected in Vermont, the data collection work group emphasized the need to develop a more **comprehensive method for collecting information about the prevalence of hazing, harassment, and bullying incidents** in our schools, how schools respond to these incidents, and what strategies are most effective.
- In addition, the data collection work group noted the need for a **centralized, accessible source of contact information for every Designated Employee in every Vermont school**; currently, no resources are available to build and maintain this kind of database.
- Finally, this work group began discussions about exploring how the state currently investigates and collects and distributes information about **teen suicides**.

Student leadership work group:

- The student leadership work group identified several possible projects to work on: a statewide conference on bullying and harassment prevention for students, the creation of a hotline for students, and the development of a website of resources for students. Ultimately, the work group focused its attention on preparing for the Vermont Youth Congress, which took place on November 7, 2013, **a one-day, statewide conference on bullying and harassment** supported by the Anti-Defamation League and the Agency of Education. The event was very successful – over 435 students and educators representing more than 40 Vermont schools attended the conference, which included 28 youth-lead workshops on a range of topics related to bullying and harassment in schools.

Staff development work group:

- The staff development work group focused its efforts in three areas: **1) training for school bus drivers, 2) teacher education program requirements and curriculum, and 3) in-service training for school staff**.
- In conjunction with the Department of Motor Vehicles (which is responsible for training provided to bus drivers), the work group provided information and feedback on the bus driver training manual and curriculum, provided a workshop for trainers who train bus drivers throughout the state, and drafted bus contract language (in conjunction with VSBIT) about requiring training for school bus drivers about responding to and reporting incidents of bullying and

harassment on school buses; work group members have been invited back to conduct the training for trainers on an annual basis.

- In addition, the work group met with Agency of Education staff to review and provide feedback on the ROPA (Results Oriented Program Approval) standards and evaluation rubric so that specific requirements related to bullying and harassment are included; while the ROPA standards may be replaced in the near future, the objective is to make sure that standards related to bullying and harassment are included in both teacher education and administrator licensure programs in Vermont.
- Work group members met with faculty in the teacher education program at UVM to strategize about adding bullying and harassment information into the curriculum and providing professional development for UVM faculty on this topic; presentations about bullying and harassment in teacher education courses started in the fall of 2013 and the goal is to eventually provide the same kind of support for all teacher education and administrator licensure programs in Vermont.
- Finally, given the dearth of trainers available to work in schools to provide in-service training, work group members began exploring the development of a **train-the-trainer program** to build a cadre of school personnel throughout the state who could provide basic bullying and harassment training to students, staff, and parents.

Additional activities and issues:

- Several council members have developed a working relationship with the New England Equity Assistance Center, a program of the Education Alliance at Brown University. Part of the EAC's work has included developing a comprehensive school climate survey, which specifically focuses on bullying and harassment and which is completed by both students and staff in schools. The AOE has entered into an agreement with the EAC to conduct a **school climate survey pilot project** in Vermont; the hope is that if the pilot project is successful in gathering and analyzing a comprehensive subset of data on bullying and harassment in schools and can be integrated with other AOE school evaluation efforts, the survey can be utilized on a broader scale in Vermont to help us gather, analyze, and better understand patterns and responses to bullying and harassment in schools. The proposed pilot project, which we hope to launch next month, will focus on small, rural schools in Vermont; 23 schools have been randomly selected to be invited to participate in the pilot project (for up to 3,500 students

total). The EAC has kindly offered to collect and analyze the data for the pilot project at no cost to the State of Vermont.

- The Advisory Council struggled with consistent input from and participation of its **student representatives** during the first year. Four high school students were initially appointed to the council, two from South Burlington and two from Bennington. Because of distance and travel issues, students participated via LNV; unfortunately, for most of the student representatives, participation was limited and inconsistent. In an attempt to address this challenge and given the critical importance of student input on bullying and harassment issues, after consideration of several alternatives and issues, the council decided in July 2013 to change the format of student participation and asked Secretary Vilaseca to appoint three new student representatives from local (Washington County) high schools with the caveat that in-person participation was mandatory. To that end, one student representative was appointed from each of three high schools in Washington County: U-32, Spaulding, and Montpelier high schools. It is our hope that this change in format will result in more consistent and informative student participation in Advisory Council meetings and activities.

General recommendations:

- The Advisory Council has no specific recommendations for the legislature at this time other than to note the ongoing need for funding to support continuing statewide efforts to provide resources and training for schools.

Possible outcomes/products over time:

- Legislative recommendations
- Creation of an information and resource clearinghouse for schools
- Consistent collection and analysis of information about bullying, harassment, and school climate in Vermont schools
- Development of additional professional development opportunities and resources for schools